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ABSTRACT

Semilingualism is discussed as a sociolinguistic concept and is viewed as a mediating variable when the society reproduces the class structure and vocational structure of suppressed minorities. A Finnish group of immigrant children in Sweden is the minority considered. It was found that the longer the Finnish children were educated in Finnish, the better their academic achievement in courses taught in Swedish. It was also found that children given no instruction in their mother tongue gradually lost competence in Finnish, without gaining full native-level competence in Swedish. This produced a subtractive bilingualism or semibilingualism, which hampered students' academic achievement. It is hypothesized that depriving students who come from a socially subordinated culture of instruction in their native language before the age of 10 may interfere with their cognitive development. The findings strongly support the case for extended bilingual education, and are relevant to those concerned with equality of educational opportunity for minority language children. (SW)

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Language in the Process of Cultural Assimilation and Structural Incorporation of Linguistic Minorities

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by Tove Skutnabb-Kangas

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FOREWORD

Bilingual education today is a worldwide phenomenon, and bilingual educators in the U.S. have a great deal to learn from experiences and research in other countries. Even recognizing the differences between countries and situations, there are probably more similarities than differences between bilingual education programs in the U.S. and elsewhere. It is important, then, for bilingual educators to adopt an international perspective, particularly in view of the relatively small amount of research thus far conducted in this country.

The research reported here deals with the educational achievement of Finnish children in Sweden, whose situation is similar to that of many minority groups in the U.S. The researchers, Ms. Tove Skutnabb-Kangas and Mr. Pertti Toukomaa, found that the longer the Finnish children were educated in Finnish, the better their academic achievement was in courses taught in Swedish.

Furthermore, it was found that children given no instruction in their mother tongue gradually lost competence in Finnish, without gaining full native-level competence in Swedish, producing a "subtractive bilingualism" or "semibilingualism," which hampered students' academic achievement. Skutnabb-Kangas hypothesizes that depriving students who come from a socially subordinated culture of instruction in their native language before the age of 10 may interfere with their cognitive development.

The findings reported here appear to strongly support the case for extended bilingual education and, as such, are of great interest for anyone concerned with equality of educational opportunity for minority language children.

The National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education is pleased to publish this very interesting paper. Subsequent Clearinghouse products will similarly seek to contribute information and knowledge which can assist in the education of minority culture and language groups in the United States.

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LANGUAGE IN THE PROCESS OF CULTURAL ASSIMILATION AND STRUCTURAL INCORPORATION OF LINGUISTIC MINORITIES

The main concern of this paper is to discuss semilingualism as a sociolinguistic concept and to try to show that it functions as a mediating variable when the society reproduces the class structure, and, along with it, the vocational structure of suppressed minorities. The minority group which I am going to discuss here is the Finnish group of immigrant children in Sweden, but I think that the same kinds of phenomena might also operate for other ethnic and linguistic minorities. The paper is based on a report written for UNESCO (Skutnabb-Kangas and Toukomaa 1976; Toukomaa and Skutnabb-Kangas 1977).

It has perhaps not always been understood that the negative factors associated with an assimilation policy are in fact the direct result of such forced assimilation. Instead of peaceful and massive integration of the minorities, conflicts, resistance, and, especially during the last few years, a powerful worldwide minority movement have arisen. We begin to see more and more clearly that, for example, the large scale educational, psychological, and social problems of minority children are <u>not</u> a failure inherent in the ethnic group status of the children, but are more or less caused by the policy of forced assimilation, regardless of whether it is a deliberate or unintended policy on the part of the majority (Ofstad 1971: 129).

The fact that the "melting pot" has very often resulted in an "unmelting pot" (Brown 1970; Glazer and Moynihan 1963) can be analyzed within the frame of reference of conflict theory: whether the dominant majority society and the minority (natives or immigrants) agree or disagree about the collective goals of the minority. When we speak of assimilation, it is valuable to distinguish between two important aspects, the cultural and the economic-structural. Certain immigrant and minority groups may wish to assimilate culturally in the mainstream society, to give up their distinctive cultural features, their language and religion; but, in general, minorities do not want cultural assimilation. On the other hand, most groups want access to goods and services, to the institutional privileges of the mainstream society (Paulston 1975: 14). In particular, if structural incorporation is defined in terms of equality with regard to social security, economic and occupational life, political participation, and opportunities for a good education for children, most minorities want structural incorporation.

The majority and the minority can agree or disagree about the collective goals of the minority (Schermerhorn 1970). Table 1 shows different alternatives with total or partial agreement and disagreement in the views of the dominant majority and subordinate minority groups on the goals of the minority. If the group wants cultural assimilation or structural incorporation for the minority, this is marked as plus (+); if it does not want it, it is marked as minus (-). This gives us 16 possible alternatives (see Table 1).

However, a long, dynamic, historical process usually precedes a consensus model like Case 9, which is the official Swedish model.

TABLE 1

Cultural Assimilation (+) v. Pluralism (-);
Structural Incorporation (+) v. Autonomy (-);
Majority and Minority Opinions about the Minority's Goals

	Total agreement		Partial agreement Partial disagreement				Total disagreement	
	CA	SI	CA	SI	CA	SI	CA	SI
	1		2		3		4	
Majority	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Minority	+	+	+	-	-	+	-	-
	5		6		7		8	
Majority	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-
Minority	+	-	+	+	-	-	-	+
	9		10		11		12	
Majority	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+
Minority	-	+	-	-	+	+	+	-
	13		14		15		16	
Majority	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Minority	-	-	-	+	+	-	+	+

The trend in different minority and majority groups varies considerably and may include a wide range of stages. For instance a "typical" course of development may well be as follows:

Stage 1 — Depressed minority, which the majority considers subordinate. Incorporation is not allowed, and the minority culture is despised. The minority has itself adopted the majority's negative picture of itself. Consensus situation. (Case 5)

Stage 2 — The minority starts to awaken and to value its own culture, but still does not believe it is entitled to the same social, educational, economic, and political benefits as the majority. Majority attitude unchanged; the same as in Stage 1. Partial conflict situation. (Case 7)

Stage 3 — The minority begins to demand not only cultural rights, but also the same social, educational, economic, and political rights as the majority. Majority attitude unchanged; the same as in Stage 1. Conflict situation. (Case 8)

Stage 4 — The majority gives in to the minority demands to hold on to its own culture, but does not give the minority the same social, educational, economic, and political rights as the majority. Minority attitude unchanged; the same as in Stage 3. Partial conflict situation. (Case 14)

Stage 5 — The majority and minority agree about cultural pluralism and the right to the same social, educational, and economic opportunities and political participation. Consensus situation. (Case 9)

If we compare official Swedish attitudes as represented in documents on immigrant policy (SOU 1974: 69; Utbildningsdepartementet Ds U 1975: 13; Lgr 69, Supplement 1974; etc.), where the slogan is "equality, freedom of choice, partnership," with the immigrant's own wishes (National Union of Finnish Associations in Sweden, Cultural and Social Policies Programme 1972; Jaakkola 1973; Kuusela 1974; Toukomaa 1973; etc), one may get the impression that there is consensus in Sweden, i.e., the majority and minority are roughly in agreement about the

goal, cultural pluralism and structural incorporation, Case 9. The official goals of Swedish immigration policy in many ways set an example internationally. As I will try to show later, the real situation is, however, more like Case 8, a conflict situation.

In order to be able to discuss how far the goal of Case 9 is achieved for the Finns living in Sweden, we must first see what role is played by both languages--the majority language (official language, in this case Swedish) and the minority's own mother tongue (in this case Finnish)--in the implementation of the collective goals.

In order to maintain their own culture, the representatives of the minority must know their mother tongue very well indeed. A distinctive culture is intimately tied to the minority's own tradition, which must be transmitted to the new generation. Transmitting cultural tradition in a foreign language is always much more difficult, if not completely impossible. Ethnic identity is also usually tied to language. Mere acceptance of a cultural tradition is itself a creative process, as each generation, as it accepts the knowledge, at the same time remolds it. But to maintain a culture, it is not enough to keep up the old, existing tradition. There must be a constant renewal, a continuously active creation of the new. Though the motor, auditory, and visual components are important parts of culture, our Western culture is still largely a verbal one. For new verbal creation the members of the minority need as good a command of their mother tongue as possible. It should be the task of the school to give the migrant children as good a command of the mother tongue as they would get in a school in their native land. Children should also have the chance

to go back to their homeland if they want, and for this they need linguistic skills equal to the standards of the native country.

Proper education is the prerequisite for structural incorporation in the mainstream of society over a broad front. In order to get a proper education, the child must know the language of instruction well. The educational system in our Western form is based largely on the verbal mediation of knowledge and skills. For example, instead of doing and trying out certain principles in practice, students and teachers describe and talk about them in school. Concept validation is not empirical, but verbally mediated. Linguistic ability in the language of instruction (as this ability is demonstrated, for instance, on the verbal parts of intelligence tests) shows a high correlation with school achievement. Higher education calls for very high mastery of the majority language (in which instruction is given)--as high as the mastery of those majority children who qualify for this education. Political participation likewise calls for good linguistic skill in the majority language. The school should give migrant children linguistic skill in the host country's language which is as good as the skill of majority children, so that the migrant children can be incorporated structurally into their new country, as much as their natural capacities allow.

If migrant children are to attain the migrants' goal--retention of their own culture, but structural incorporation into the new society--they must, then, be able to learn both their own native language, L1, and the foreign language, L2, as well as comparable monolingual children do. Thus, they must become completely bilingual in so far as this is

possible. As we shall see, this goal has not been achieved for the Finns in Sweden in either language, though bilingualism is officially the goal of schooling. This is shown by the results of Professor Pertti Toukomaa's study. Toukomaa studied almost 700 Finnish children in two communities in Sweden (Table 2). In Olofström the children did not have any instruction in their mother tongue, not even as a subject. In Gothenburg some of the children had Swedish as the medium of instruction, but studied Finnish as a subject two hours per week, while other children attended experimental preparatory classes, where all the instruction was given in Finnish and Swedish was studied as a subject. Toukomaa tested the children both with nonverbal intelligence tests and with different language tests both in Finnish and in Swedish. The children made average scores on the nonverbal intelligence tests (Table 3).

On the Finnish picture vocabulary tests (Tasola; Table 3), the Olofström children, with no instruction in Finnish, had the lowest scores, whereas the children in the Gothenburg experimental Finnish classes had the highest scores. Both of the third grade groups instructed in Swedish, in Olofström and Gothenburg, performed at a level lower than 90% of Finnish children in Finland. However, the experimental class did not approach the average score of Finnish children, either. This shows that their Finnish was poor already when they entered school; preschool in the mother tongue seems to be a necessary prerequisite. The performance in Finnish of all the other children, except the Gothenburg experimental children, was so poor that one suspects that these children do not know enough Finnish either to maintain their own Finnish language

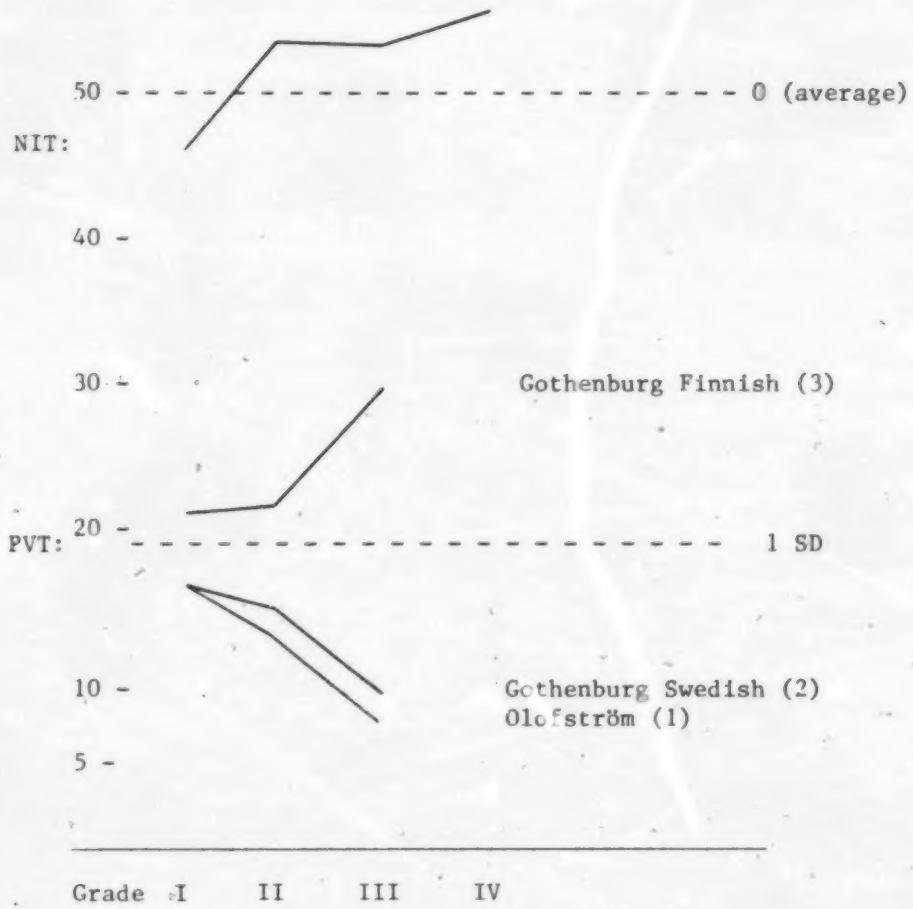
TABLE 2

Number of Pupils

	Grade							Total
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII-IX	
OLOFSTRÖM (1) all instruction in Swedish	60	48	42	34	46	43	78	351
GOTHENBURG (2) instruction in Swedish; Finnish as a subject	25	23	32	51	38	33	-	202
GOTHENBURG (3) instruction in Finnish; Swedish as a subject	46	58	30	-	-	-	-	134
								N = 687

TABLE 3

Nonverbal Intelligence Test and Picture Vocabulary Test (Finnish)



culture in Sweden or to be able to go back to Finland and to go to school there.

If we do not concern ourselves with the consequences for the children's mental health and identity resulting from their inability to fully participate in the home life and culture of their Finnish-speaking parents, then we might consider their forgetting Finnish not to be catastrophic, provided the children could learn enough Swedish to be able to succeed in the Swedish school system, and thereby to be able to incorporate structurally into the Swedish society. But this was not the case. The performance of the children was even poorer in Swedish (Table 4).

Even on the Swedish tests the Olofström children, who had all their instruction in Swedish, made the lowest scores. When compared with the average scores of Swedish children of the same age, they scored more than one standard deviation lower. Only 10% of the Swedish children scored as low as the average Finnish Olofström children.

Of course, competence in Swedish correlated with the time spent in Sweden. The average time in Sweden was approximately 4 1/2 years. One might think that the children would reach the Swedish average in a few years. Table 5 shows the total results of the Swedish and Finnish tests for those Olofström children who had spent more than seven years in Sweden. Even after seven years they had not reached the average competence of Swedish children in the Swedish language. At the same time they had forgotten their mother tongue faster than they had learned Swedish. Probably both their Swedish and especially their Finnish will always remain much poorer than the Swedish or Finnish average.

TABLE 4

Swedish Tests, Olofström

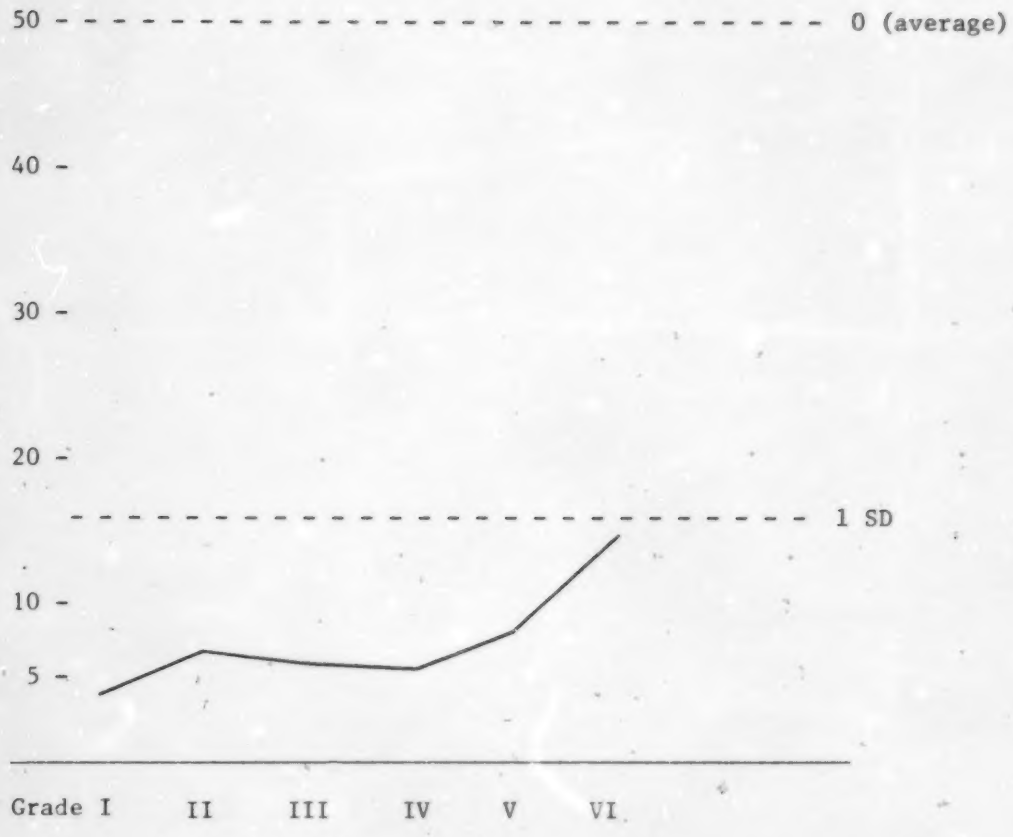
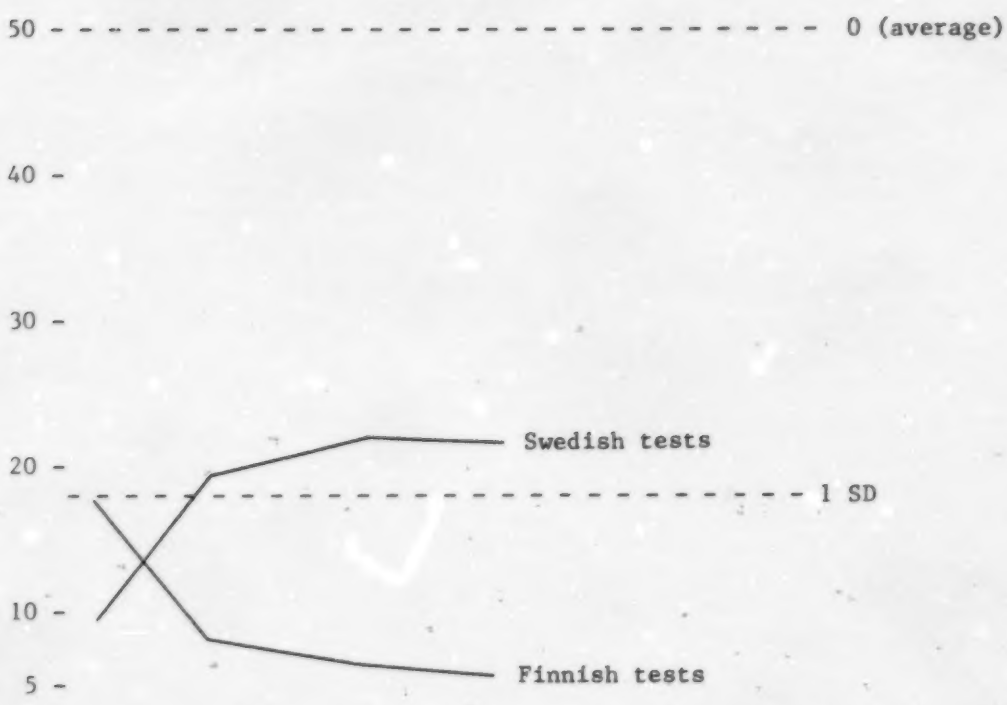


TABLE 5

Children in Families with a Minimum of Seven Years in Sweden



Age	7-8	9-10	11-12	13-15
N	21	20	24	16

And this phenomenon, that the children know neither Swedish nor Finnish as well as native speakers, has been called double semilingualism.

What this means to school achievement is easy to anticipate, since language still is the most important means for learning at school. Mastery of the language of instruction shows high correlation with school achievement. In Table 6 we can see the general tendency for school achievement. On a scale of one to five, the average for the Swedish children was three. Only in the subjects where language played a minimum part did the Finnish children come close to the average.

Only 58% of immigrant children, compared to almost 90% of Swedish children, enter the Swedish gymnasium (terminal secondary school) after the comprehensive school, and very few of them choose the theoretical track which prepares for university education. This means that most immigrant children do not receive adequate vocational training. They are forced to take the same kinds of jobs which their parents now hold: heavy, dirty, dangerous, unpleasant, monotonous jobs with low social status (Widgren 1975: 7).

Here is a brief summary of what Toukomaa's results imply:

- The children's poor skill in the mother tongue prevents them from developing a strong and balanced national and cultural identity. This leads to psychological and social problems as well as forced cultural assimilation.

- The children's poor skill in the foreign language prevents them from receiving a good education, advancing in working life, and taking part in the social, economic, and political life of the society on a broad front on equal terms with natives, i.e., it prevents structural incorporation. The fact that the majority and minority officially agree upon the collective goals of the minority is not, then, enough for real equality of educational opportunity, as long as no positive discrimination is exercised in practice. It

TABLE 6

School Achievement, Means (M) and Standard Deviation(SD), Olofström

	Grade III		Grade VI		Grade VII-IX	
Subjects	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Swedish	2.2	0.9	1.9	1.0	1.9	0.9
Mathematics	2.4	0.8	2.3	0.9	2.8	1.1
Religion	2.5	0.9	-		-	
English	-		2.5	0.8	2.4	1.2
Social Studies	2.4	0.9			2.5	0.9
Geography	-		-		2.5	0.9
Biology	-		-		2.4	0.8
Chemistry	-		-		2.3	0.9
Physics	-		-		2.4	0.8
Music	2.5	0.8	2.8	0.9	-	
Handicrafts	2.8	0.7	-		2.6	0.9
Drawing	-		3.0	0.7	3.0	1.0
Physical Education	3.0	0.8	3.0	1.0	2.9	1.0

> should be accepted that satisfying the educational needs of all children on an equal basis does not have to mean the same methods for all.

What then are the different methods for different groups? The Toukomaa study is not unique. From all over the world we have reports of minority children instructed in a foreign language with poor school achievement as a result. Most of the children in these studies with poor school achievement have received their instruction in their L2, but the point is that their mother tongue has very often been either totally banned from the school or studied only as a subject, often a subject with low status. They have had very poor opportunities for developing their mother tongue into an instrument capable of serving all the functions which a basic language should serve in a modern society. Often there is a demonstrated correlation between high competence in a foreign language and high competence in the mother tongue. And, vice versa, there is good reason to believe that children who cannot fully develop their mother tongue have great difficulties in learning an L2 properly. In Toukomaa's study the children who knew Finnish best also learned Swedish best. Table 7 shows that those children who had started school in Finnish in Finland and had had an opportunity to develop their Finnish as a school language demonstrated the highest degree of mastery on the Swedish listening comprehension test. Children instructed in the Finnish language in Sweden learned Swedish much better than children who had all their instruction in Swedish. According to the Swedish results, it seems that unless minority children have their mother tongue as the medium of instruction, they will not develop it to the same degree as monolingual native speakers. And if

TABLE 7

Listening Comprehension (Swedish) and the Language of School Entry

	Group 1 Started school in Sweden		Group 2 Started school in Finland School years in Finland before emigration	
Test mark (%)	Swedish classes	Finnish classes	1--2	3 or more
1-2 (-)	12	4	14	12
3	50	33	17	12
4-5 (+)	38	63	69	76
	100%	100%	100%	100%
	N = 82	49	29	17

they don't develop their mother tongue, they are not going to learn L2 properly either, at least not as well as native speakers of that language, even though it is the medium of instruction.

But there are also other kinds of results from instruction in an L2. From Wallace Lambert's famous studies from Montreal or Merrill Swain's Toronto studies or my own small study in Finland, we know that at least middle class children, but probably also working class children, can become bilingual and do well at school even if they are instructed in a foreign language (Lambert and Tucker 1972; Gaudino, Barik, and Swain 1975; Skutnabb-Kangas 1975a, 1975b). When we compare the bilingual children in Lambert's and other studies with the more or less semilingual immigrant children in Toukomaa's study, we notice at least three important differences:

1. The bilingual children belonged to a linguistic majority in their country; the semilingual belonged to a minority.

2. The mother tongue of the bilingual children had either higher prestige than the language they were learning as their L2 (like English in Canada, which is a high status language compared with French) or at least the same prestige. I think this is a very crucial point. A language which is not used as a medium of instruction seldom gains the same prestige as school languages. If the minority group is economically suppressed, as it often is compared to the majority group, the children's mother tongue needs even more overt prestige to be valued and learned by the children.

3. The bilingual children or their parents were free to choose between instruction in L1 or L2. If they chose an L2 school, their motivation was supposedly high and their integrative attitudes positive (Lambert et al. 1970). Usually minorities have no choice; they are forced to be instructed in the majority language, even if they feel it to be a threat to their own ethnic and linguistic identity.

Semilingualism is then, according to my view, produced in a situation when many different factors coincide: minority children from work-

ing class homes are forced to accept instruction in the foreign, majority, middle class language, and their own language has a low prestige, both in the society and in the school. The same kind of instruction in an L2 for middle class children from a linguistic majority group, whose language has high prestige, does not result in semilingualism, but in bilingualism.

Thus, the educational system in industrial Western countries helps to ensure the continuation of the class system and the conservation of the social structure of society. Since the system operates on majority terms and the majority will need assembly line workers even in the future, the educational system reproduces the migrant's existing professional and social structure, even if its official aim is to give migrant children the same opportunities as children in the host country. In this respect the function of the semilingualism of migrant children as a factor transferring and increasing inequality is understandable.

Among the countries which claim to provide equality of educational opportunity, few have taken any action to democratize elementary education, including preschool (Perrenoud 1974). In spite of declarations of intent, the reforms necessary to neutralize the effects of the social inequalities of schooling are not being carried out. Reform, e.g., preventing semilingualism by giving instruction in the mother tongue of minority children, is often opposed, with the opponents appealing to the lack of empirical research data. Before action is taken, the opponents often demand experimental research into matters on which experimentation would be ethically condemned or is humanly impossible.

The results of pedagogical measures, or the lack of them, may not be seen for many years, even decades. The fact that decisions about reform are put off until such "reliable" data are available is one proof of basic unwillingness for reform, i.e., the lack of political will.

If a complete lost generation of semilingual children is not to emerge, we do not have time to wait for the findings of new research and experiments. It is pedagogically wise to give migrant children and other minority children as much teaching of and in their mother tongue as possible, even though we have not yet thoroughly studied the phenomenon of semilingualism. Such teaching will certainly do no harm, but not giving it may prove fatal.

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